

Rights & Responsibilities

These can be used for publication in parish bulletins, catechetical newsletters, etc.

Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral, and Christian must be shaped by three questions: What does the economy do *for* people? What does it do *to* people? And how do people *participate* in it? The economy is a human reality: men and women working together to develop and care for the whole of God's creation. All this work must serve the material and spiritual well-being of people. It influences what people hope for themselves and their loved ones. It affects the way they act together in society. It influences their very faith in God.

Economic Justice for All, USCCB, 1986

Basic justice also calls for the establishment of a floor of material well-being on which all can stand. This is a duty of the whole of society and it creates particular obligations for those with greater resources. This duty calls into question extreme inequalities of income and consumption when so many lack basic necessities. Catholic social teaching does not maintain that a flat, arithmetical equality of income and wealth is a demand of justice, but it does challenge economic arrangements that leave large numbers of people impoverished. Further, it sees extreme inequality as a threat to the solidarity of the human community, for great disparities lead to deep social divisions and conflict. Christian faith and the norms of justice impose distinct limits on what we consume and how we view material goods. The great wealth of the United States can easily blind us to the poverty that exists in this nation and the destitution of hundreds of millions of people in other parts of the world. Americans are challenged today as never before to develop the inner freedom to resist the temptation constantly to seek more. Only in this way will the nation avoid what Paul VI called "the most evident form of moral underdevelopment," namely greed.

Economic Justice for All, USCCB, 1986

Beginning our discussion of the rights of the human person, we see that everyone has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life...Therefore a human being also has the right to security in cases of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment, or in any other case in which one is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of one's own.

Pacem in Terris, Pope John XXIII, 1963

While public debate is often divided between those who focus on personal responsibility and those who focus on social responsibility, our tradition insists that both are necessary. People have a fundamental right to life, food, shelter, health care, education and employment. All people have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1999

A well-ordered human society requires that men recognize and observe their mutual rights and duties. It also demands that each contribute generously to the establishment of a civic order in which rights and duties are more sincerely and effectively acknowledged and fulfilled. It is not enough, for example, to acknowledge and respect every man's right to the means of subsistence if we do not strive to the best of our ability for a sufficient supply of what is necessary for his sustenance.

Pacem in Terris, Pope John XXIII, 1963

In Catholic teaching, human rights include not only civil and political rights but also economic rights.... This means that when people are without a chance to earn a living, and must go hungry and homeless, they are being denied basic rights. Society must ensure that these rights are protected.

Economic Justice for All, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986

Basic human rights are all essential to human dignity and to the integral development of both individuals and society, and are thus moral issues. Any denial of these rights harms persons and wounds the human community. Their serious and sustained denial violates individuals and destroys solidarity among persons.

Economic Justice for All, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986

Christians, on pilgrimage toward the heavenly city, should seek and think of these things which are above. This duty in no way decreases, rather it increases, the importance of their obligation to work with all in the building of a more human world. Indeed, the mystery of the Christian faith furnishes them with an excellent stimulant and aid to fulfill this duty more courageously and especially to uncover the full meaning of this activity, one which gives to human culture its eminent place in the integral vocation of man.

Gaudium et Spes, Second Vatican Council, 1965

...from this intimacy that is a most personal gift of the Lord, the strength of the Sacrament of the Eucharist goes above and beyond the walls of our Churches. In this Sacrament, the Lord is always journeying to meet the world. This universal aspect of the Eucharistic presence becomes evident in today's festive procession. We bring Christ, present under the sign of bread, onto the streets of our city. We entrust these streets, these homes, our daily life, to his goodness. May our streets be streets of Jesus! May our houses be homes for him and with him! May our life of every day be penetrated by his presence.

Homily May 26, 2005, Feast of Corpus Domini, Pope Benedict XVI

The gift of Christ and his Spirit which we receive in Eucharistic communion superabundantly fulfills the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart; at the same time it elevates the experience of fraternity already present in our common sharing at the same Eucharistic table to a degree which far surpasses that of the simple human experience of sharing a meal. Through her communion with the body of Christ the Church comes to be ever more profoundly “in Christ in the nature of a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate unity with God and of the unity of the whole human race.

Ecclesia de Eucharista, Pope John Paul II, 2003

Ethical responsibility is not just avoiding evil, but doing right, especially for the weak and vulnerable. Decisions about the use of capital have moral implications: Are companies creating and preserving quality jobs at living wages? Are they building up community through the goods and services they provide? Do policies and decisions reflect respect for human life and dignity, promote peace, and preserve God's creation? While economic returns are important, they should not take precedence over the rights of workers or protection of the environment.

Everyday Christianity, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1998

As economic and ecological issues are increasingly intertwined, we see more clearly that the earth's resources are not limitless. Industrialized nations consume more and more of what God created for all to enjoy, while developing nations can scarcely support their populations. Biblical teachings about the essential goodness of creation, the human person's responsibility for the stewardship of God's gifts, and the thoroughly changed heart are important resources to draw upon as we try to establish an economy that is just, sustainable, and ecologically responsible. In addition, the Church's tradition of simplicity, embodied in the original charisms of religious orders, merits serious reflection and dialogue as a means of addressing the imbalance.

Called and Gifted in the Third Millennium, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1995

While public debate is often divided between those who focus on personal responsibility and those who focus on social responsibility, our tradition insists that both are necessary. People have a fundamental right to life, food, shelter, health care, education, and employment. All people have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Corresponding to those rights are duties and responsibilities to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1999

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected--the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions, USCCB, 2005

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, "it is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. . . . As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life" (nos. 1913-1915).

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2007.

By fulfilling their civic duties, guided by a Christian conscience, in conformity with its values, the lay faithful exercise their proper task of infusing the temporal order with Christian values, all the while respecting the nature and rightful autonomy of that order, and cooperating with other citizens according to their particular competence and responsibility. The consequence of this fundamental teaching of the Second Vatican Council is that the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in 'public life', that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good. This would include the promotion and defense of goods such as public order and peace, freedom and equality, respect for human life and for the environment, justice and solidarity.

Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life, Offices of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 2002.

The Church recognizes that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based on a correct understanding of the human *person*. Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle, for otherwise the witness of the Christian faith in the world, as well as the unity and interior coherence of the faithful, would be non-existent. The democratic structures on which the modern state is based would be quite fragile were its foundation not the centrality of the human person. It is respect for the person that makes democratic participation possible. As the Second Vatican Council

teaches, the protection of the rights of the person is, indeed, a necessary condition for citizens, individually and collectively, to play an active part in public life and administration.

Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life, Offices of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 2002.

The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation “in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good.” The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility. Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as “social charity”

Deus Caritas Est, Pope Benedict XVI, 2005

For the Christian people of America conversion to the Gospel means to revise all the different areas and aspects of life, especially those related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good. It will be especially necessary to nurture the growing awareness in society of the dignity of every person and, therefore, to promote in the community a sense of the duty to participate in political life in harmony with the Gospel.

The Church in America (Ecclesia in America), Pope John Paul I, 1999

This statement (Faithful Citizenship Document) highlights the role of the Church in the formation of conscience, and the corresponding moral responsibility of each Catholic to hear, receive, and act upon the Church’s teaching in the lifelong task of forming his or her own conscience. With this foundation, Catholics are better able to evaluate policy positions, party platforms, and candidates’ promises and actions in light of the Gospel and the moral and social teaching of the Church in order to help build a better world.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2007

It must be noted also that a well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals. The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine. A

political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church's social doctrine does not exhaust one's responsibility towards the common good.

Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life, Offices of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 2002.